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ABSTRACT

The author cites conditions for error within schools as one major reason for limited effectiveness of instructional supervision. The ongoing diagnostic process of identifying conditions that reduce the effectiveness of supervision is termed organizational learning. The importance of involving the entire school system is emphasized, and the initial participation of senior level administrators is stressed. It is explained that data collected at each level of the system could be used to construct an organizational map identifying conditions for error and the effects on the school's social system. Feedback and potential solutions are then considered. Conditions for implementing organizational learning are summarized. The author offers an example of such organizational learning undertaken at a residential school for handicapped students. Results of the efforts at the school are said to have increased the effectiveness of supervision by requiring administrators to focus on their own behavior first. (CL)

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Organization Development Strategies to Increase the Effectiveness of Instructional Supervision

by

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I believe that many educators would agree that the effectiveness of instructional supervision is a major concern for school administration. For example, the literature on supervision indicates that 1) there are few agreements on what the process should look like or on what the supervisor should do in supervision, and 2) supervision is not really effective and not highly valued. Goldhammer (1969) said "supervision has neither a fundamental substantive content nor a consciously determined and universally recognized process, both its stuff and its methods tend to be random, residual, frequently archaic, and eclectic in the worst sense." Sturges (1979) found that teachers wanted direct assistance from supervisors to improve learning opportunities of children, but the teachers viewed the supervisors in administrative roles which were not directly related to improving instruction. Blumberg and Cusick (1970) in an analysis of verbal behavior of teachers and supervisors reported that 1) supervisory behavior tends to reinforce problems created by organizational structure, and 2) the participants in supervision displayed adaptive behaviors such as distancing, avoidance, and ritualism.

With all of the current models of supervision (Pohland, 1976, describes seven of them), why is supervision less than effective and not highly valued by teachers and supervisors in schools? Assuming that the theoretical quality of the models is within acceptable limits and assuming that supervisors have the minimum competencies required for supervision, I am willing to predict that supervision is generally ineffective and not highly valued because there are conditions for error within the schools which reduce the effectiveness and value

of the supervision process. These conditions for error include unhealthy group norms for organizational behavior, policies and procedures which are not well thought out, and administrative/supervisory behavior within the traditional organizational structure of schools. My position is that if the effectiveness and value of any model of supervision is to be increased, then the conditions for error must be diagnosed and then corrected. Diagnosis can be done by applying specific organization development strategies within the context of individual school systems. Correction can be attained by implementing and monitoring an action plan which is derived from a valid diagnosis of the conditions for error. Diagnosis/correction is part of a cyclical process which could be called organizational learning (a term which is described more completely by Argyris and Schön, 1978). This process of organizational learning will be described later.

School organizations are social systems. Beer (1980) describes a social system as having eight structural components which interact with each other to affect organizational outcomes. These components are environment, organizational outcomes, human outputs, organizational behavior and process, organizational structures, people, the dominant coalition, and organizational culture. Within each of these components are many elements; e.g., within the organizational outcomes component there are elements such as absenteeism, apathy, and avoidance of responsibility.

The structural components, and their elements, interact with each other. This interaction can have positive, negative, or mixed effects. Some negative or mixed effects can be mild, and therefore tolerated by the organization, while other effects are strong and cause a great deal of pain. Also, what might be a mildly negative effect in one school may be very painful in another school. Here is an example of the interaction process identified above.

> A school superintendent wants to implement a process of diagnostic supervision in her school district. Supervision is an element of the organizational behavior and process component of the school's social system. Supervision can be affected by other elements within the same component; e.g., by decision-making processes. Supervision processes interact with existing organizational structures such as job descriptions, performance evaluation policies, and management control tools. Supervision is significantly affected by the needs, interests, abilities, and expectations of the people within the school. Human outputs such as motivation, energy, attitudes about the school's effectiveness and levels of risk taking influence supervision. The culture of

> the school and the members of the dominant coalition produce effects on the process of supervision. And finally, organizational outcomes such as student achievement levels and the quality of life within the school have impact on the process of supervision. Supervision, in turn, also has affects on the elements of all the other components of the school's social system.

Given the problem of increasing the effectiveness and value of instructional supervision in a school and given the interrelationships of the structural components of a social system, it makes sense to me that the problem-solving process must begin with a careful diagnosis which focuses on conditions within the social system which are currently reducing the effectiveness and value of supervision or which have the potential to do so. This diagnostic process,again,is called organizational learning.

Organizational learning is a process for discovering conditions for error, inventing solutions for the errors, producing the solutions, and evaluating and generalizing the effects of the solutions. This process not only focusses on responding to the symptoms of the errors, but also on eliminating or lessening the effects of the underlying causes of the errors; causes such as unilateral decision-making. Organizational learning is an on-going, cyclical process rather than a singular diagnostic activity.

Organizational learning to increase the effectiveness and value of instructional supervision involves individual teachers, small and large groups of teachers, and the entire school system. The process must begin by designing and implementing diagnostic activities for the senior-level administrators. Beginning at this level is important because if others in the school are to become fully involved in a process of surfacing conditions for error, then they must see clearly that the senior administrators are committed to this process. Another reason for starting at this level is that some of the major conditions for error (e.g., unilateral decision-making) exist at this level.

Given the involvement of the senior administrators in the process of organizational learning, similar diagnostic activities would be conducted at various levels of the school organization; e.g., with the middle managers (i.e., the principals or supervisors) and with teachers. The diagnostic data collected at each level would be used to construct a hypothetical map of the organization which identifies the conditions for error and their effects on the school's social system. Once the diagnostic data were analyzed and the map constructed, all relevant members of the school would be provided with feedback about the data and the map. After the data were validated and accepted by the members of the school who received the feedback, then appropriate courses of action would be selected to invent, produce and evaluate solutions to the identified problems.

Before organizational learning could be implemented within a school system, several conditions must be met. First, members of the school must recognize the need for organizational learning. Second, the school must be open to and capable of learning. Third, members of the school, especially the administrators and supervisors, must be willing to make an explicit commitment to generate valid information, assure free and informed choice, and secure internal commitment to the choices that are made (Argyris' (1970) intervention activities). Fourth, arrangements must be made to enhance interpersonal openness during group diagnostic activities. Specifically, this means that senior administrators, and others when appropriate, must go on public record that individuals or groups will not be endangered if they produce information that is valid but threatening and that all public reports of the diagnostic data must not identify individuals. Fifth, senior administrators must be prepared to make a commitment to the process of correcting the diagnosed conditions of error. To the extent that the above conditions for organizational learning exist, the potential effectiveness of the process of organizational learning will be enhanced: the fewer the number of conditions in place, the less likely it will be for the learning process to be effective.

The data that are collected and presented to the members of the school must be validated by those members. The members of the school simply confirm or disconfirm the validity of the diagnostic findings. Given the validity of the diagnostic findings, these can be acted upon

in many ways. Specific courses of action will vary according to the specific diagnosis and to the ability of the school to solve the identified problems. Some schools will need to focus first on solving easy problems and then progress to solving more difficult ones. Other schools may be at a level of readiness for addressing the more difficult problems first. Whatever course of action is contemplated, there are general criteria which apply to the selection of courses of action. That is, the specific course of action that is taken to correct a condition for error must help the school and its members to: 1) produce, understand, and use valid information; 2) solve and implement solutions in such ways that the problems remain solved; 3) accomplish 1) and 2) within existing cost constraints; and 4) accomplish 1) and 2) in such a way that the existing level of competence for problem-solving, decision-making, and decision-implementation activities is not reduced and preferably increased (Argyris, 1970).

Although in its initial stages organizational learning would be primarily concerned with diagnosing conditions for error within the school, the climate that would be developing within the organization would have a beneficial effect on people within the school. The climate would improve as the conditions for error were surfaced and as some of the effects of these conditions began to be reduced. Some examples of the effects of conditions for error the reduction of which would tend to improve organizational climate are: being blind to one's impact on others, polarizing issues (i.e., "us vs. them"), destructive internecine warfare, games of deception, and win/lose dynamics.

As an example of how the process of organizational learning can be applied, I will share with you a brief description of a real-life intervention. The description presented below only describes some of the entry-level activities of the intervention which began in July, 1983--it is not meant to be a full-blown case study report.

In July, 1983, I was asked to come to a residential school for a handicapped student population to respond to their identified need to improve the process of instructional supervision. This intervention was to take the form of 7 days of instruction on the theory and practice of supervision. Additionally, with the permission of the participants in the course, the instruction was coupled with organization development activities. The rationale for coupling organization development strategies with instruction on instructional supervision is described above in detail.

The participants in the learning activities were, with two exceptions, all members of the school administration team. This group included the Superintendent, the Assistant Superintendent, the Public Relations Officer, 4 Division Heads, 1 Assistant Division Head, 1 teacher who was aspiring to a supervisory position, and 1 teacher from outside the school system who was invited to participate in the course.

Prior to my arrival, each participant was required to prepare a case study which described their perceptions of the supervisory process within the school--its strengths, weaknesses, etc. The participants were asked not to identify or describe specific individuals, but to focus on the process of supervision as they perceived it.

Using a diagnostic process which included analyzing the individual case studies, interviewing individuals using a non-threatening conversational mode, and observations of people as they interacted in class, I was able to construct a hypothetical map of the organization. This map was presented to the members of the group as a diagnostic report. The diagnostic findings were stated as my perceptions and hypotheses and then put before the group so that they could confirm or disconfirm the validity of the findings. Without exception, the members of the group confirmed the validity of the diagnostic findings which were presented to them.

The diagnostic findings, which, again, came from multiple sources, were at two levels: superficial and deep. The superficial problems focused on the technical problems of supervision in the school; e.g., there was a high degree of role conflict for the "Supervising Teachers" in the school--a conflict which expected them to be both administrators and instructional supervisors. The deeper level problems focussed on interpersonal issues, especially within the administrative team. An analysis of these interpersonal issues follows.

From 1972-1977, the school in question was in a severe state of disequilibrium. During that period of time there was a high rate of turnover within the administrative staff, including six superintendents. In 1977, the present Superintendent was named to that position. Through the extraordinary efforts of that Superintendent and his administrative team, the school regained some stability. Approximately four years ago, the Superintendent reorganized the school which, again,

increased the stability of the school. Finally, during the present Superintendent's tenure, not only has the stability of the school increased, but also its reputation within its professional area.

In July, 1983, I asked the administrative team plus two teachers to prepare case studies about the process of supervision within their school. They also knew that I would be using the cases to diagnose other problems related to the quality of life within the school and that I would be presenting my diagnoses to them. The case study project provided the members of the team with an opportunity to discuss issues which had been previously undiscussable. This inference is supported by statements from the case studies such as "I would appreciate your discretion in the utilization of these data. Some things can't be changed and are best left unsaid."; and, "I have found this case study to be most difficult and revealing." The words "unsaid" and "revealing" suggest that some of the issues surfaced in the case studies were undiscussable.

It was fascinating to note that the undiscussable issues referred to above were, what I call, "open secrets" whereby members of the team knew that these issues existed, may have even discussed them with one or two close associates, but never discussed them as a team. Thus, everybody knew that these issues existed, but they all acted as though the issues were secrets when they met as a team.

Not only were there undiscussable problems but there also seemed to be inaccessible problems. It was my inference that there were some

deeper organizational problems which were inaccessible to outsiders, except through the process of piecing together information and then drawing inferences from that hypothetical map of the school.

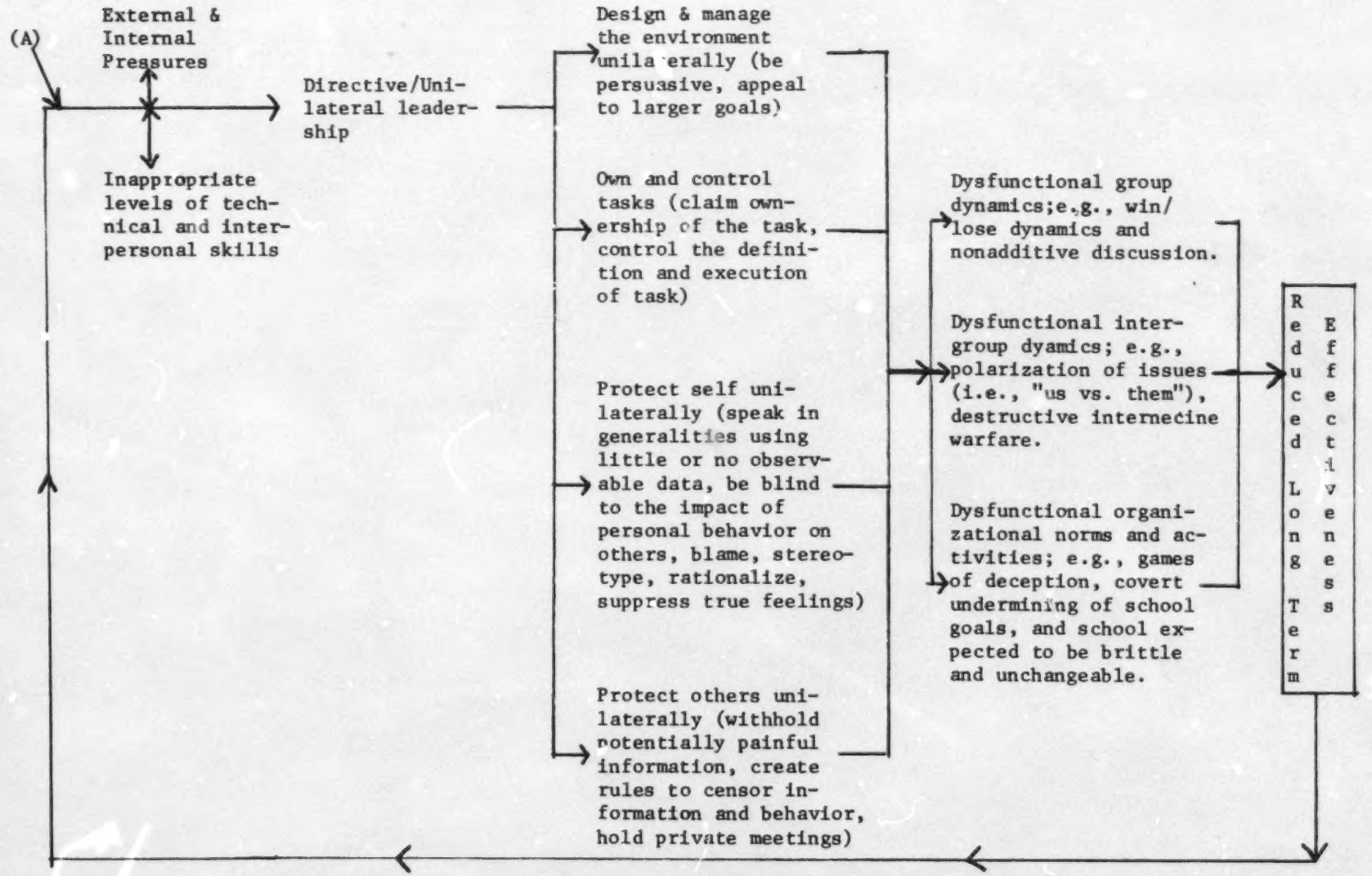
Given the diagnostic information that was collected, I prepared a hypothetical map of several of the major, deeper-level problems that the administrative team was facing. The map was presented to the team so that they could confirm or disconfirm the validity of the hypotheses and predictions. Without exception, the map presented in Figure 1 was validated. An explanation of that map follows.

——— Insert Figure 1 ———

The present Superintendent entered the school's social system in 1977 at point (A). At that time the school was in a tail-spin--out of control. This situation was characterized by extraordinary environmental (e.g., compliance with P.L. 94-142) and internal (e.g., high teacher and administrator rates of turnover) pressures. Additionally, the Superintendent and his administrative team had inappropriate levels of technical and interpersonal skills to manage effectively some of the more difficult problems that they were facing.

Given the level of pressure and the need to regain control of the school, the Superintendent and his administrative team tried some innovative managerial techniques; e.g., shared decision-making. But when quick results were not gained as a result of using these techniques, the administrators returned to a traditional management style; directive, unilateral leadership. The action strategies for this style of leadership were that the administrators 1) designed and managed their work

Figure 1: A primary inhibiting loop reducing the effectiveness of administration and supervision


(A)
External & Internal Pressures
Inappropriate levels of technical and interpersonal skills
Directive/Unilateral leadership
Design & manage the environment unila erally (be persuasive, appeal to larger goals)
Own and control tasks (claim ownership of the task, control the definition and execution of task)
Protect self unilaterally (speak in generalities using little or no observable data, be blind to the impact of personal behavior on others, blame, stereotype, rationalize, suppress true feelings)
Protect others unilaterally (withhold potentially painful information, create rules to censor information and behavior, hold private meetings)
Dysfunctional group dynamics;e.g., win/lose dynamics and nonadditive discussion.
Dysfunctional intergroup dyamics; e.g., polarization of issues (i.e., "us vs. them"), destructive internecine warfare.
Dysfunctional organizational norms and activities; e.g., games of deception, covert undermining of school goals, and school expected to be brittle and unchangeable.
Reduced Long Term Effectiveness

environment unilaterally, 2) owned and controlled tasks, 3) protected self unilaterally, and 4) protected others unilaterally. The behavioral consequences of these action strategies were dysfunctional group dynamics, dysfunctional dynamics between groups, and dysfunctional organizational norms and activities. These consequences reduced the long term effectiveness of the team and the various units of the school under each of the team members. The behavioral consequences plus the reduced long-term effectiveness were perceived by the administrators and caused them to become increasingly directive and unilateral, which in turn started the self-sealing cycle of dysfunction again and again.

The directive, unilateral leadership of the administrators, which was originally motivated by their extraordinary professionalism, their need to meet deadlines, and their need to be accountable overburdened them. As they assumed more and more ownership of the tasks they lost their flexibility and their potential to respond to unanticipated events. They were so caught up in the day-by-day (a phrase used frequently in the team members' case studies which provided a diagnostic clue to the nature of life within the school) operations, that it soon became a matter of day-by-day survival. Thus, unanticipated deadlines became crises which demanded immediate attention. The crisis-to-crisis pattern of management placed severe psychological and physical stress on the administrators, thus tending to affect <u>their</u> morale and health (the Superintendent even suffered a heart attack in 1979).

So what does all of the above have to do with increasing the effectiveness of instructional supervision? The fact is that the behavior and attitudes of the senior-level administrative team were producing negative

consequences throughout all levels of the school. There was low morale, a loss of self-motivation, avoidance of responsibility, hostility and/or apathy toward the administration, a lack of commitment to the goals of the organization, a polarization of issues into "us vs. them," win/lose dynamics were people withheld information that was needed by decision-makers, and camouflaging of feelings which resulted in covert efforts to "screw things up." Instructional supervision cannot be truly effective in such a climate of dysfunction.

To increase the effectiveness of instructional supervision, therefore, these deeper level problems need to surfaced and addressed first. The conditions for error (the unilateral action strategies presented in Figure 1) need to be ameliorated or eliminated. Paralleling this diagnostic activity all administrators and supervisors must be learning how to learn, to be developing the skills which will need to be used to maintain new levels of supervisory (and administrative)effectiveness. Of course, not only will these people need to learn the skills for implementing and maintaining organizational learning, but they will also need to increase their personal levels of proficiency in the technical and interpersonal skills of administration and supervision.

At this point, you may be interested in knowing about the response of the administrators in the earlier case study to the diagnostic findings. On the last day of the seminar on supervision, after the diagnostic results had been shared, discussed, confronted, and validated, an action plan was designed. In summary, that action plan was to: 1) collect more diagnostic data from middle-level managers about instructional supervision, 2) seek financial resources for increasing the effectiveness of supervision and

supervisors, 3) begin a process of developing the senior-level management team, which will begin with an administrative problem-identification--problem-solving retreat in the late fall, and 4) work together as a team to begin reducing some of the conditions for error which were diagnosed and validated. All of the above actions will be managed by the team with periodic technical assistance from external consultants. In essence, the senior administrators have begun to increase the effectiveness of instructional supervision by focussing on themselves, and their behavior, first.

In conclusion, my basic position in this paper has been that there are conditions for error within schools which constrain or reduce the effectiveness of instructional supervision. To increase the effectiveness of instructional supervision, these conditions must be diagnosed, surfaced, confronted, and validated by the members of the school, especially by the senior administrators. Given validation, action plans must be generated to correct the conditions for error. This process is called organizational learning and it can increase the effectiveness of instructional supervision.

To be attached to "Organization Development Strategies to Increase the Effectiveness of Instructional Supervision" by Francis M. Duffy, Ph.D.

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